

Safety Centre
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Preventing Driver Fatigue



#DriveSafer

Introduction

Mums and dads, especially those with babies, are often sleep deprived, struggling to get through the day while in zombie mode. This means they're usually not at their best when driving – often while their little ones are strapped into the back seat.

Just one sleepless night affects a person's judgment, reflexes and memory, making driving all the more difficult. Read our helpful guide on how to prevent driver fatigue and stay alert at the wheel.

The facts

Research carried out by Millward Brown on behalf of Liberty Insurance (June 2014) showed some alarming stats:

- A third of adults nationwide (34%) have admitted to driving after less than 5 hours sleep
- 45% of drivers nationwide said they experienced incidents when driving fatigued
- Worryingly, the research found that 6% of drivers had nodded off at the wheel
- In addition 15% stated they have observed a fatigued driver nodding off at the wheel

Has it happened to you?

Don't remember the last few kilometres you drove? Missed an exit off the road? Had a near miss or collision? Crossed a lane when you shouldn't have? Been slow to react or late to brake?

If any of the above sound familiar then you have probably experienced driver fatigue.

How to recognise a tired driver

It can be very difficult for a driver to assess their own level of fatigue. The ability to self-assess decreases the more tired you get; meanwhile your self-confidence in your driving ability remains. Here are some warning signs to look out for:

- Trouble focussing or zoning out
- Head nodding or straining to keep eyes open
- Feeling fidgety
- Cramps in legs
- Repeated yawning or rubbing your eyes

Reasons for fatigue

Messed up sleep pattern

Humans have a natural biological rhythm during the 24-hour period which affects things like body temperature, hunger and alertness. This can have a significant effect on our waking lives, especially if we are awake at times when we are prone to sleepiness. This means parents on awkward feeding and sleep schedules are often less alert when they are awake.

Getting less sleep

Mums and dads know all about poor sleep. If your quality of sleep is not what it used to be, you're more than likely going to experience daytime drowsiness.

Stress

Life throws up all kinds of stresses and strains that can take their toll on people. Stress is known to have many negative effects on the body and between lessening your quality of sleep and wearing you down mentally, it can lead to driver fatigue. Controlling your stress is easier said than done, but identifying the root of your worry - be it financial, work or personal - and forming some kind of plan to deal with it will provide some relief.

Medication

Many over-the-counter treatments for colds, flu and even hay-fever can cause unwanted sleepiness – something that can impair your driving. These medicines usually contain antihistamines, which help your runny nose, soothe your allergies and also cause fatigue. This is the reason antihistamines are also active ingredients in some sleeping tablets.

Tips to help mum's get a better sleep

Your best counter measure to driver fatigue is to ensure you get a proper sleep before you get into the car. We know it's easier said than done for parents, but here are some tips to make the most of the sleep you do get.

- Not the easiest task if your baby is sleeping next to you, but making your bedroom a dark, cool, peaceful place can really help your quality of sleep. Consider removing distractions, such as the TV.
- Routines can be very beneficial, so try to get to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time the next day.
- Worrying is often the thing that keeps mums awake, so combat this by making a list of what needs to be done the next day.
- Sleep consultant, Lucy Wolfe, from sleepmatters.ie, gives this advice to new parents struggling with sleep deprivation: "If you are feeling under par and particularly tired, you need to reach out for support. Say yes to the offers for help and also let others do the driving if necessary so that you're not putting yourself in danger,." Lucy also advises sharing night-time feeds with your partner, if possible.

Minimising risk of driver fatigue

Some quick and helpful tips to #DriveSafer and avoid driver fatigue from Liberty Insurance

- Plan the route in advance and take note of rest areas where you can take a break, have a refreshment to stay hydrated and stop and stretch your legs
- Make sure you're well rested, especially before a long journey
- Avoid driving alone on long-distance trips. Passengers can both share in the driving and participate in conversation, which can help you stay awake.
- Allow yourself ample time to reach your destination so you can take advisably frequent breaks. Try to stop about every two hours, or every 150kms.
- Make a point of getting out of the car and walking at least a short distance, where it is safe to do.
- Driving for long periods at night makes fatigue much more likely. By avoiding travelling during these hours, you escape the glaring dashboard and road lights. That alone will help decrease your risk of motorway hypnosis.
- Finally, if you're losing the battle against fatigue, stop and rest in a safe place. Sleep consultant, Lucy Wolfe, says: "If you are feeling drowsy while you are driving, you need to pull over, and take 5 or 10 minutes of time out before you go back on your journey."

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